{See Note at end.}

UNITY

CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT,

FOR

FREEDOM, FELLOWSHIP AND CHARACTER IN RELIGION.

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THE HOUSE.

By Rev. Dr. C. A. BARTOL, of Boston.

MATT. xii: 44—"My House."

A somewhat Oriental statement, that man or woman is a house to let. But every house is either occupied or empty, deserted or let, or to be let. But the house in the text is the man, first a beast, then a barbarian, a hunter, a herdsman, a planter, a house-builder, and himself a house, owned perhaps by an unclean spirit that may at last bring seven worse for company. To such intrusion a house left empty is exposed. House-letting is a great business. An abandoned building tends steadily to desolation and ruin. Its doors are unhinged, windows broken, ceilings cobwebbed, its threshold over-grown with thorns, its shingles warp to let in the rain and snow; its foundations slant and settle: it becomes a resort of crime and shame; it is haunted—what a business house-letting has become! But the house that a man is he never alone can fill. It will have company in it, good or bad. The sign *To Let* long hanging at a gate signifies poor property, out of repair, less in demand every year, doomed to be torn down. To get a good tenant who will not deface the chambers, break the chairs, and leave dirt and decay behind when he goes, is the lessor's or landlord's aim. And what harm to the house which we are, from the careless, wanton, wicked callers, guests and visitors we admit and entertain! Why are we so much more dainty about the use and storage of our material mansion than of our mind? We say of some article of furniture, ugly or out of fashion, we would not have it in the house. The law forbids indecent prints. But what uncleanly things, bare images, pictures, such as we would not tolerate or dare to hang on the walls, we suspend and survey in the gallery of our imagination or stow away in our bosoms, not grudging the room and not thinking how much space, that might be turned to better purpose, they take up! People live often in the lower story or kitchen of their abode, content with having as a duty adorned the parlor they seldom enter, but keep only to dust and sweep and garnish and close up with blinds and curtains from the light. So how we stay drudging and dishevelled in the basement of our souls, and never ascend to lift in them the sash to let in the sun of love or gaze into the sky of hope, not availing ourselves to the best advantage of this living domicile of our frame by the great designer planned and raised! How we praise the architect who has made the

most of a site or situation for our bodily residence and comfort! Where are our thanks to him who has fashioned this lodging which is the lodger too? If our gratitude is spent in words and ceremonies, however displayed and intended, instead of that service of our fellows in which the Creator's goodness is continued in our person, like a lesson practised, never done, scheme carried out, mathematical line produced, what reason will he have to be satisfied with the blank return? How can he consider that we have paid our rent? The shrewd operator knows how important is the character and responsibility of those to whom he grants leases or sells building lots. One bad neighbor may destroy the value of a locality and spoil a whole region, as if the land had a leprosy. Our nature is no solitary spot, but part of an undivided territory of family, society, community, the humanity we move in and are part of. The fortune we construct for ourselves is not insulated, but in a block, with but thin party walls. Everybody's companionship is part of himself, as of others he is part. Like collegians we board in commons.

Have you a house to let? Have you let it? Yes, the poorest mortal must reply. Is it a small house or a large one? Immense; its dimensions can never be told, however narrow-minded, comparatively, you may be. Does not the material world exist entirely on our feeling of it, and but for our senses would it not cease to be? Without some one to see and hear, launch forth and explore, there could be no song of bird or laughing brook or rolling and reflux tide, or revolving star; no reality of the outward sphere, so says philosophy, but for the perceiving, interior and all-embracing soul. Nor could any person be save for and in other persons. There is no individual absolute and apart. "We are members one of another," each one a sum total of impressions and affections, a web of relations, a houseful, busy ant-hill, swarming hive. Nor is the character of any residence on the planet more determined by the behavior and habit of its inmates than is our bosom by ghosts of which it is an abode. Is it necessary to send out your cards of invitation, spread a table, prepare the feast, celebrate an occasion with loaded dishes, ringing glasses, plying the knife and fork, with crazy clatter of crockery, in order to have company? Answer me, brother-spirit, living house that thou art, O house never long vacant, conscious that thy companionship fixes thy destiny for weal or woe; yet perhaps in thy selection of tenants not careful or wise! Who and what are the familiar spirits that have the entry of our apartments, the freedom of that city of God which our precincts abut on and should open into? No doubt, the moment we wake, certain customary figures do arise, converse and abide in us without ringing the bell, while God and Christ may stand and knock at the door waiting to hear from us and get our permit to come in. "No admission except on business" at our portal may shut out a prince or our best friend. I pray you, then, make an inventory, not of your worldly goods alone, but spiritual possessions, of which your associates and associations are chief. Love and honor all men; but take not any man or woman at random and by chance into your heart's recesses heedless of their intent, more than you would take pains to clear the way for a thief or burglar under your roof.

Yet, praise God, the ill consequences of unfit society and comradeship are quite insignificant and transient, to the blessing and benefit of a true and noble friendship. Give a long lease of the living house you are to *that;* and ask no rent for what it is enriched and made more valuable by! There is but one pauper, miser, unhappy man in the world; and he may live in no poor-house but in a prison and penitentiary in himself; the man with nobody to love or by whom he is dearly loved. Is there anybody thankful for the sight of your face and sound of your step, glad that you are alive, claiming that you shall not die, insisting or expostulating with God; if you are unclothed of flesh, you shall be clothed upon with some heavenly form; and if such mate vanish before you, are you aware of like yearning for his or her continuance in the realm of mystery, flinging a glove of defiance in the face of death in behalf of a will and quality in

him or her, which has title to survive though every plant wither and race perish and candle of the sun be snuffed out in the sky, and naught be left but "stars silent over and graves silent under"? That, in the Bible, is the resurrection, the communion of saints, fellowship of souls; and the meaning seems not too vast to any one whom experience has made sensible of the power to educate and immortalize in a mortal figure of an infinite unselfish love. A man may have a palace and will have a hard time in it if he be alone! Go build you a house on the shore, like an eagle's eyrie mid the magnificent cliffs fronting the sea, the glorious headlands outstretched as fingers to furnish a frame for the picture of your beauteous estate; yet, unless love with the loved and loving ones light up all the halls and purlieus, it will be a barrack, a sentry-box, not a home. We cannot rejoice in our solitary selves. We must live, if life is to be a boon, in others' eyes: and when their kindly glances fail or are averted, or exchanged for indifference or hate to appear instead, we are ready for the sexton, for the reason of our being is gone.

This necessity of mutual regard runs through nature, animal and human, and is demonstrated on the lowest plane. Wherefore and from what motive that late sad sight of unintended suicide of the man who leaped into the river from the great Brooklyn bridge? Lunatic, moonstruck, we say he was. Yes, with the madness, insanity of a natural organ of approbativeness, only excessive, misdirected and perverted from its proper happy exercise and end. Even in eluding the police, who would have arrested his foolhardy enterprise, and in sending before him his decoy to divert attention while, disguised in his coarse cart and sloven's dress, he stealthily advanced to the dizzy edge of the railing, soft-stepping as a cat, he had this approval, admiration of his fellows in view. From privacy and studied obscurity in the preliminaries of his exploit he wished all the more in his amazing performance to start out and to blaze on their esteem; as Napoleon affected close retirement in Paris when contriving for imperial sway. "I will show them," said the muscular professor to himself, "what a swimming-master I am or in that line can be! Blondin crossed Niagara on a wire; I will dive into the Hudson. No president or plenipotentiary shall be more famous than I, as expert with hand and foot as a gull or duck winged and webbed." In descending like a painted arrow or shooting-star he lost the balance of his body, as he had already that of his mind. But in his awful fate we read an illustration, inverted and upside down, of the power of those sympathies by which we live in each other; and we learn a lesson to steer on these billows of emotion by which we are all so upborne and tossed. If in the house of wealth and prosperity discord arises and the feeling changes from sympathy to antipathy, and peace like a tropic calm breaks into storm, and the seeming angel casting off his garment of light uncovers the cloven foot, then the handsome structure is an abiding-place no longer; and the auctioneer with his cry and hammer, amid lounges and mirrors and pictures and finely-bound books, novels and bibles, arrives to celebrate the downfall more melancholy than in the magazine story, and tell in the language of his profession the dismal tale. But already love had been going, going, gone!

Persons are sometimes brought into court for keeping a disorderly house. But such a house may be the soul in us, without criminal conduct or violent speech. "Set thy house in order," is a precept but half obeyed till every voice and motion within are in unison, and the harmony reaches through all the chords of that musical instrument our nature still is, however jangled out of tune; for no abuse can turn a harp into a scream-whistle or a house into an under-ground den of wild beasts; although, as there are uninhabitable houses, so there are folk of such temper nobody can live with them. Of a certain Ishmaelite in the village yonder it was said, he ought to be by himself all alone. But, I answered, he is a member of the church. That makes no difference, was the rejoinder; a remark which offers food for reflection and research as to whether it be worth while to be on the ecclesiastic record in regular standing.

In the beautiful Greek idiom, *stranger*

is transformed into both *host* and *guest* under the same term; and in English, house means hospitality: but no language can be so fine as the Christian fact that there is not a hovel or ten-foot building on the Russian steppes or in the western wilds whose owner will not give to his visitor the best he has. A man's house is his castle, runs the proverb; and, says the British orator, the rain and wind may beat on it, but the king not pass over its lintel without leave. But the house, our house, with all the religious modern improvements, is an inn of entertainment, where the choice portion or pleasant excursion or treasure of art or nature is offered to every caller or friend, the inhabitant proud and pleased to reserve nothing of his own delight, feeling justified only in the possessions he imparts. Is the mental house and hospitality up to the same mark? Have not you and I received from or sometimes served out to others words and sentiments quite unlike the delicious viands on our board? Insolence, injustice, harsh tones and looks more bitter than the gall given Jesus to drink on the cross, —have they never been set before you and me on what we thought the table of communion with a familiar acquaintance, though not made of mahogany-wood or spread with white linen or covered with silver plates of bread or cups of ruddy wine? A man that would sooner cut off his right hand than withhold from me under his eaves any of the luxuries on which he dines, will, in a conversation about some question of philanthropy or property, treat me to several uninviting courses of his anger and contempt, although those feelings are of no use to settle the matter in debate. Is *he* a good householder? Not even with his swell front in the city, rustic retreat amid the hills, or gay cottage on the coast.

My house, it is yours! This interior habitation, which I am, more costly and durable than one of oak or marble, welcomes you to the ideas, affections, aspirations, hopes, all the furniture which no mechanical artisan ever fashioned and adorned; and, before God, as here I live and stand, I would rather deal out to you sour bread and stale water than ill humors and unreasonable whims. I will not invite you to feast with an unclean spirit, or any one or all of the seven more wicked he may find in dry places to fetch back, after taking his intermission or vacation of going out. "His ban sounds like a benediction;" so said one of a man who had kindly and softly denounced an ill-doer. If we are good in ourselves from having eaten and drunk Christ's flesh and blood, the goodness will pervade our demeanor; nor can, more than the atmosphere, be pumped out.

Wherefore but because of love did men not continue to live in caverns or roam through waters, but built houses to hold more than one, to reclaim from wandering, to unite round a table and a hearth, to make their bed in peace instead of a couch and lair in the desert, mid the rocks? Because he "loves the gentle Desdemona" Othello gives up his "unhoused" condition. But we will not echo the lines of Byron, a poet later than Shakespeare, and not so good:

> "O that the desert were my dwelling-place,
> With one fair spirit for my minister,
> That I might all forget the human race,
> And, hating no one, love but only her."

The broadest expanse were narrow and would prove a Sahara with any single human creature to limit the love which God ordains for no monopoly! Let our house-keeping be more generous. "Occupy," says the Master, "till I come." Would the house yonder be complete without doors, windows, kitchen, laundry and drain? Let the inward house have a gate that swings easy and does not creak on its hinges. Let truthful transparencies stand for the panes of plate-glass, and patiently listening ears be doors which no just petition seeks in vain. Let a watchful conscience dust and sweep and wash every nook and corner. Ventilate with every wind of honest opinion that blows. Then, under this little but wondrous arch and dome guarding the brain, instrument of the soul, will be joy.

The judgment is not afar, but in your house. The judgment-seat is no outward bar; it shines in the eyes of the mate and the child at your side. Not they who gossip about us in circles or on the street decide our doom. An unspoken sentence is pronounced in the conscience of those

we have begotten and borne, who sit at our board. Beware of dogs, writes the apostle. Let them in human shape bark and welcome at my heels as much as they please, if I can have the good opinion, the cordial approbation of those who lay in the same cradle as I, or whom I hushed to sleep when they were my own babes. O man and woman, whose union is the foundation of home, the girder, ridge-pole and strong-course of the house, without honor for each other as the first feeling there can be no true love.

Our "Church-Door Pulpit" hints its purpose in its name. It aims to furnish fortnightly a transfigured tract,—transfigured by being paid for, and by representing not so much a given system of beliefs as the emphasis, in somewhat varying beliefs, on "Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion;" this tract to be taken from the rack or table at the church-door to the home, there to serve its little mission by reading in the family, lending to a neighbor, mailing to a distant friend, etc. We hope the plan may be destined to wide adoption by Liberal churches as part of their regular church-work.

The word "UNITY" in the title bears to the Committee who arrange the series a wide meaning, pointing more to the substance, than to the forms, of religious thought and faith; and in inviting contributions they have sought, not only through the whole range, but in both directions beyond the range, of those who bear the "Unitarian" name,—though most of the writers must naturally be found within that name. "New Orthodoxy," "New Judaism," those who care for no name but "Religion," and the "Ethical Societies," will all be represented. The choice of subject is left to the writers; and *each writer is responsible for his own utterance alone, and for nothing else in the series.* "One of your best—a life-helping sermon, or a thought-sermon reaching the life," was the invitation sent out.

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UNITY CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT.

The second year of the "CHURCH DOOR PULPIT" began in April, 1885. Of the series of twenty sermons, four numbers will be devoted respectively to

Channing, Parker, Emerson, Martineau,

giving a score or two of what in each writer may be called his "*Gospel passages.*" If one would learn in short space for what the four great prophets of our Liberal Faith stand, let him read these numbers; and keep them on hand to give a friend. If these four pamphlets do not furnish "Scripture readings" for the *pulpit* also, it will be a surprise.

In three more numbers the subjects

"God," "Miracles," "The Bible,"

will be respectively treated in extracts from several writers. Each of these three pamphlets will be, as it were, a handful of short liberal tracts on its special subject.

The other thirteen numbers of the series will be sermons from as many preachers,—preachers ranging in their thought from Liberal Orthodoxy to the Society for Ethical Culture; most of them finding a home, therefore, under the Unitarian name. To announce the broad religious fellowship, the "unity without uniformity" of faith, implied in such pulpit comradeship,—to announce and emphasize and further that, is one purpose for which the CHURCH-DOOR PULPIT as well as UNITY was started; it is one purpose which itself started "Unitarianism." The independence of each writer is guarded by the note printed on his sermon, that he is responsible for his own alone, and for nothing else in the series. The list, alphabetically arranged, stands:

Felix Adler,
C. A. Bartol,
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Phillips Brooks,
John W. Chadwick,
Rowland Connor,
Washington Gladden,
T. W. Higginson,
S. H. Sonneschein.
John C. Learned,
Andrew P. Peabody,
Minot J. Savage,
John Snyder,

The hope is that our churches, West and East, will catch the new church-habit, to *regularly and freely furnish forth a table or shelf near the door with such pamphlets*, first for home reading and then for lending and mailing, *each reader becoming his own missionary society for whatever he finds worthy.* It is found that a minute's "prelude" from the minister, describing the "Church-Door" sermon for the day and its preacher, interests the people in it and him, and usually causes the table to be swept of its thirty, forty or fifty copies. But much of the people's interest depends upon this prelude-habit. To make his dumb colleague do good work the minister must treat him heartily.

Of course some of the sermons will be more liked than others, and be better fitted for mission service. If now and then, among the twenty, one contradicts words spoken at the other end of the church, what then? The note on each pamphlet explains the matter; and, if necessary, the "prelude" can explain it farther. But it should be remembered that these sermons, departing somewhat from our thought, are the very ones which best preach our Gospel of Religious Fellowship, which show we *mean* it.

In this way nearly 30,000 "Church-Door Pulpit" sermons were distributed more or less widely last year, mainly in the west. It is probable that nothing like so many tracts could have been circulated here in any other way. And probably no better way can be devised of making each church, East and West, a little "Propaganda" society of our Faith and Principles. Everybody knows *one* person who would like to read what *he* likes. Anybody will hand or mail one tract. And this local and post-office Propaganda is much more likely to enlist members and interest the church at large, if the work is allowed to cost them a trifle, than if it costs them nothing. A tract *paid for* is almost redeemed! Paid for by one of its receivers and on-speeders instead of by some Society, it is "twice blessed,—it blesseth him that gives and him that takes."

Each Church that subscribes $25 for a block of fifty copies and uses them thoroughly through individual readers, as here suggested, besides any good done in its own homes, sends out twenty times fifty, or one thousand tracts a year, to spread the Liberal Faith—a little mission well worth adding regularly to any church-life.

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